



## John Hilliard Rathke

August 29, 1923 - September 17, 2012

John Hilliard Rathke Huntsville Native, 5th Generation Texan, and the Organizer of the Windham School District John Hilliard Rathke passed away peacefully at his home on September 15, 2012, shortly after celebrating his 89th birthday. He was born at his parents' home in Huntsville on August 29, 1923, the only son of Francis Marion (Thompson) Rathke and John Hamilton Rathke. John attended Huntsville schools where many life-long friends knew him as "Hilliard." He was a charter member of the Huntsville High School Band where he played clarinet under the direction of Sam Houston State Teachers College student Elliot T. Bowers, who would eventually become another one of SHSU's excellent presidents. After graduating from HHS in 1941, John enrolled as a music major under Dr. C.R. Hackney at SHSTC, where he met Margarett Oliver. The attack on Pearl Harbor occurred before his first college semester was over, and John enlisted in the Army Air Corps in January of 1943. The following November, John and Margarett married in the Base Chapel in Nashville, TN. Discharged as a Sergeant after a little more than three years of service, John and Margarett returned to SHSTC, graduating in 1948. With a double-major in music and industrial arts, John began his professional career in the Brazosport School District as a band director and shop teacher. After a year's leave of absence to earn his Master's Degree at SHSTC, he changed his career path to public school administration, finishing his Brazosport I.S.D. career as their Assistant Business Manager. John left Freeport in 1962 to become the Assistant

Superintendent for Business of the Harlingen I.C.S.D., quickly getting their financial house in order. But the Lower Rio Grande Valley was a long way from his aging parents, and in spite of winning numerous awards in teaching, Margarete dreamed of having her own fabric store. So, in 1968, they returned to Huntsville and opened Fabric Carousel, now located on the south side of Huntsville's downtown square. After building the store's fixtures and helping Margarete get it running, John worked briefly for Centennial Construction, the company that developed the shopping center that now houses McKenzie's Bar-B-Que and Shenanigan's. But his "escape" from "school business" was about to end. Dr. George Beto, whose Ph.D. was in educational administration, had secured permission from the Texas Legislature to create a non-geographical public school district for inmates housed at all prison units, and had hired Dr. Lane Murray as its first superintendent. John, with his extensive background and experience with public schools, was hired to organize the Windham School District. John's original title was "principal," but his duties were to hire personnel, formulate curriculum, organize the business, budget, and accounting procedures, and to create the schools at each of the prison units. "Dr. Murray started out with a borrowed file cabinet and a secretary, and I was the next employee," John recalled. "She asked me to help her, since she said she had only taught high school and college courses in education. I started with business problems, including hiring teachers and most administrators. In fact, I ended up mostly running the entire school for years. I did that mostly because Dr. Murray was gone so much to national and international meetings, and to Austin to [lobby the legislators to] get laws passed so that we could make this thing work. She would tell me to run things while she was gone, and I did. She also informed the Texas Department of Corrections administrators of my status. "It was quite a challenge and fun in those early years. No one had ever done what we were doing, and we had to invent ways of getting the job done." John retired in 1982, ending 34 years in public and institutional education. After Margarete sold Fabric Carousel in 1984, they were able to travel, and John was able to participate in church and

community service. Besides assisting Margarete in her many activities, John served as an election judge and was elected to the local Hospital District Board. In previous years, he had served as a Cubmaster and Scoutmaster, and Sunday School Superintendent. He was a long time member of the First United Methodist Church, a charter and life member of the Huntsville High School Ex-Students Association and the Beta Delta chapter of Kappa Kappa Psi, a life member of the SHSU Alumni Association, served on several credit union boards, and participated in many professional associations. Not long after Margarete died in 1998, John moved in with his son, where he lived his final years. John H. Rathke was preceded in death by his parents, his beloved wife, and his daughter, Janice R. Thompson. He is survived by his son, long time Huntsville dentist Dr. David O. Rathke and wife, Pamela Ryan Rathke. He was very proud of his three grandsons: James L. Henry of Huntsville, Bryan Rathke and wife Elizabeth Grona of San Antonio, and Benjamin Rathke, currently a senior at HHS. The family would like to thank Dorothy Harrison and other employees of Remember the Lillies, and Jean Sharp for their extensive and devoted help in taking care of John during his last months. Also, our thanks to Dr. David Prier, who welcomed the Rathkes into his practice during his first days in Huntsville, and who has gently eased the whole family through the entire Circle of Life. Special thanks go to Rosa Cardenas, who cared for John like a daughter. Her selfless and untiring efforts helped John to enjoy his less-abled final months, and aided the family in innumerable ways. Graveside services were held Monday morning, September 17th at Brooke Cemetery in Huntsville with Rev. Ellen Willett officiating. Memorials may be sent to the First United Methodist Church of Huntsville, or the charity of your choice. Those wishing to leave memorial condolences for the family may do so at [www.shmfh.com](http://www.shmfh.com)

# Tribute Wall



“ *John Hilliard Rathke*

November 15, 2022 at 08:33 PM



“ *I first met the Rathke family when I started working at Fabric Carousel, shortly before their retirement. I so enjoyed the entire family, and have memories of a strong work ethic, family ties, and sense of humor! And oh the roses Mr. Rathke Sr. would walk to the square to bring to the shop... It was fun to watch the loving, verbal sparring of Mr. & Mrs. Rathke, they were so sweet together. I am just amazed at Mr. Rathke's life's work, as well as his sense of family. a life well lived!*

**Belle Hansen** - October 13, 2012 at 09:30 PM



“ *Your family are in my thoughts. Please throw all you burdens upon God for he will sustain you as Psalms 55:22 says.*

**mary miller** - October 04, 2012 at 07:27 PM



“ *David and Pam, I was so sorry to hear of your loss. I'll keep your family in my thoughts and prayers.*

**Gaye Clements** - September 25, 2012 at 02:47 PM

DE

“ *Mr. Rathke was such a dear man and total professional. His dedication to the goals of Windham School District with Lane Murray and the dreams for educating the incarcerated helped it continue to be the premier example of what does work in prison in the rehabilitation and future of men and women when they are released to society. Always a smile, always a practical answer and a sweet person. I'll miss you.*

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**Dana Eckles** - September 21, 2012 at 11:07 AM

SB

“ *Dear David and family. I am so sorry to hear about your father. He was such a very nice person. Now he is with our savior and in no pain or problems. My thoughts and prayers are with you all.*

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**Sandra Bean** - September 17, 2012 at 11:10 AM

KW

“ *David, Pam, Bryan and Benjamin,*

*So sorry to hear of your loss. The few times I saw him, David, your father was very nice. May your memories of times spent with him bring you comfort.*

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**Kathy Wooley** - September 16, 2012 at 11:43 PM

DT

“ Dear David, Pam and family. You are in my thoughts and prayers. I am so sorry to hear of your loss of Mr. John. I always thought so much of him and eventhough I haven't seen him in a while, I will trully miss him. Now, he, your mom, my James and your grandparents can visit again in Heaven. They had many good conversations and visits here in Huntsville. I would imagine there will be a big celebration in Heaven. I am going to try to come to the funeral tomorrow. Y'all will definitely continue to be in my thoughts and prayers. Take care and if there is anything I can do to help you through this sad time, please let me know. Love to all of you.  
Dorothea, Ruth and Rachel

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**Dorothea Tarver** - September 16, 2012 at 06:53 PM

RC

“ Dear family "Rathke & James" it was a privilege working for Mr. John, I am missing him already, my prayers to you and many thanks for allowing me to be apart of his last years of life. May God gives you peace in this time of sorrow. Love Rosa

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**Rosa Cardenas** - September 16, 2012 at 01:32 PM

GG

“ Dear Family,  
John was a fine gentleman and friend. Windham School District owes much to John. Blessings to you in the coming days as you say goodbye.

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**Greg and Dani Gathright** - September 15, 2012 at 07:03 PM

BN

“ Sorry to hear of Mr. Rathke! A Huntsville icon, who will be missed. Blessing and prayers for the Rathke families.

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**Beverly Conner Niederhofer** - September 15, 2012 at 12:30 PM